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Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-sixth session

27 February-9 March 2012

Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern, and further actions and initiatives; priority theme: "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges"

Statement submitted by the Federation of Cuban Women and the Women's International Democratic Federation, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.



Statement

Joint submission from the Women's International Democratic Federation and the Federation of Cuban Women

The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF), a non-governmental organization representing millions of women around the world that has been granted general consultative status by the Economic and Social Council, and the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status since 1997 with more than 4.2 million members, take this opportunity to make a statement on the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges.

Both organizations believe that capitalism has plunged the world into a deep and far-ranging crisis. This crisis is compounded by: the active pillaging of the planet's natural and energy resources, particularly in the South; imminent climate collapse; and the food crisis with its devastating effects, such as hunger, poverty and migration. In addition, humanity is facing increasing social inequality and deepening class divisions, the growing power of multinationals, wars and the trend towards authoritarianism.

All of these various crises are a consequence of the mentality driving capitalism, imperialism, (neo) colonialism, patriarchy, militarization and the exploitation of human beings and nature.

Third World countries have witnessed the pillaging of their resources, the persecution of their peoples and even a forced change in their leadership by imperial command, an act that tramples their sovereignty, committed with complete impunity. Women, together with their daughters and sons, suffer the worst effects. Wars bring with them a rise in the killing of their children, rape and famine. Unemployment rates are higher among women, while wages are lower.

While the situation of rural women has improved on various fronts, they continue to face circumstances that limit their social participation in many areas, such as a lack of access to land, resources and credit and to adequate health, education, culture and social welfare systems.

The poorest of the poor are women. According to the United Nations, more than 300 million people, most of them women in developing countries, live in extremely precarious conditions within the so-called informal employment sector, without any kind of social security, insurance, or disability or retirement benefits.

Rural women, including indigenous women, play a vital role in the rural economies of developing and developed countries. It is women who perform the very hard tasks of cultivating the land, caring for animals, educating boys and girls, maintaining the household and caring for the elderly. However, in many cases they do not receive recognition either from the labour sector or from society for the work they do, and they continuously suffer the violation of their rights.

Michelle Bachelet, the Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), in her statement on the International Day of Rural Women last October said:

In some parts of the world, women represent 70 per cent of the agricultural workforce, comprising 43 per cent of agricultural workers worldwide. Yet despite their heavy workload and productivity, rural women continue to face discrimination, which is not only a lack of justice but holds back gains in vital areas. If women farmers had equal access to resources and opportunities, they would drive greater progress in ending hunger, boosting food security, and improving health and education.

The Food and Agriculture Organization [of the United Nations] points out that if women farmers were given the same access to resources such as seeds, credit and fertilizer, the results could be significant. Women's agricultural yields could increase by 20 to 30 per cent, raising agricultural production in developing countries by up to 4 per cent. It would also mean 100 million to 150 million fewer people going hungry.

FMC and WIDF support her statement and hope that the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which will focus on the empowerment of rural women, will actually set out policies and action plans to help these women.

It is critical to ensure that rural women enjoy greater recognition and visibility and true gender equity, including equal pay for equal work.

If we wish to reach these goals, it is also critical that we act to eliminate social exclusion by eradicating poverty, promoting decent employment, effectively redistributing wealth, and facilitating access to education, health and culture. The more vulnerable, poor and excluded social groups are, the more urgent and intensive our actions should be.

States have a sufficient number international instruments on this issue, including the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the conventions of the International Labour Organization. Rural women await for their effective implementation.

The United Nations has the support of the Women's International Democratic Federation and the Federation of Cuban Women in continuing its work to fulfil the needs, demands and dreams of rural women around the world.



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Statement submitted by Institut de politique familiale, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.



Statement

Women

The future of all societies depends on the institution of the family, because families fulfil the basic needs that States are unable to satisfy, especially in times of economic turbulence and values crisis such as those we are currently living through. It is families that bring up children; and they are required to educate them and help them develop their personality. Recognizing this makes us responsible for the march of societies and the collective endeavour this entails.

At the same time, respect for human life forms the basis from which society develops. If we wish to progress as a society, we need to recognize the fundamental role played by the family in that process. The promotion of human rights includes family rights and the right to life; for which reason the institutions of marriage and family life need to be protected.

Marriage and family should not be promoted by political authority alone, but by society itself, whose specific goals need complementary contributions from men and women, through their unique capacity to generate filiation and fraternity, and thus propagating society through motherhood and fatherhood.

The economy of society and the different peoples are founded on the sustainability of the family; for if we fail to protect this institution, peoples eventually die out with the passage of time. To prevent this from happening, we must give the family the place and protection it deserves — both in its own right and because it is the future guarantor of a united world. Past failures to support the family have generated a variety of problems in society, with three major consequences:

1. Demographic winter
2. Family de-structuring
3. Loss of the value of motherhood, and a total failure to reconcile family life and work.

Why do we talk so much of the family, when many people see it as an obsolete institution? Because it is what enables men and women to fulfil their natural roles under equal terms. It is where each one's roles are combined instead of being divided; where a man and a woman share the same duty, situation and commitment.

Today we focus on the role of women in society, and their intrinsic value expressed in motherhood; and, above all, how they are able to comprehend and live their lives both as mothers and as women working outside the home.

Neither men nor women live two separate lives, one while working and the other when we are at home with our children — in other words a personal life and another professional life which are mutually independent. Instead we are a global whole that is capable of fulfilling several occupations and responsibilities at the same time.

The values attached to work-family reconciliation currently tend to be understood as challenging the woman to forge a professional career of her own,

while her family waits at home. The consequences of this are children who grow up without the mother figure; and a population deficit in which women have just two children at most.

Nonetheless, we should not forget that the family, and the role of women in particular, is essential in forming the human and social capital needed to subsequently develop stable commitments and bonds.

One way to view the social and enterprise benefits of this conciliation is in terms of work- family enrichment; in other words, the extent to which the experiences gained in one role enhance the quality of life in the other.

Another way of valuing its importance for firms and society is to understand what talent means for an enterprise, and how hard it is to retain the best talent at any stage of the business cycle. Talent can be defined as aptitude multiplied by attitude; in other words, the product of the employee's skills, on the one hand, and the commitment with which he or she puts those skills to work in an enterprise, on the other. According to Nuria Chillida, as this is multiplicative, while a person's knowledge and skills may be outstanding, if their commitment to the firm is 0, their talent will be equal to 0.

We therefore need to implement policies and an organizational culture that reconcile the demands of work and motherhood, to enable women to bear and raise children without being forced by their firm to give up their professional career; in other words, it needs to be possible for women to simply stop working for a period without putting their job at risk.

This investment is necessary for the sustainability of both enterprises and society; it is an institutional duty of major social responsibility, since it has the greatest daily impact on people's lives.

In addition to making an huge contribution to breaking free from the demographic winter we are currently experiencing, and to making the pension system sustainable, motherhood enables women to grow as individuals, and it adds value to society and enterprise. Nonetheless we should not lose sight of the societal model that influences motherhood through different legislative arrangements.

The reconciliation of family life and work should be bi-directional; in other words, public authorities need to understand that this also means facilitating motherhood in the context of a professional career, by ensuring that maternity status does not mean the loss of the woman's value or talent. Quite the contrary, it involves higher esteem and a generosity that increases the woman's worth.

Governments should implement public policies to promote women's intrinsic value, expressed in motherhood, without maternity meaning the woman losing her job, or reducing her chances of career advancement or her worth in an enterprise. The reforms currently being introduced tend to engage men in care activities to some extent (less than 50%); but they also aim to make it easier for women to continue to bear the most of the responsibility while maintaining their participation in work outside the home, insofar as they can make the two compatible.

But the underlying point is that the key mechanism for our children's upbringing and for family life involves making sure motherhood can be continued without being cut short by the demands of work; in other words, gender equality

should allow women to decide whether they want to return to work after maternity leave, without this having negative consequences for their professional career.

A genuine reconciliation would enable a woman to decide what she wants to do at each point in time; in other words, freely decide, without coercion or pressure, to have the number of children she wants, without having to resign herself to being a mother of just one. This would represent true empowerment of women and ultimately society at large.

It is well known that women who work outside the home suffer continuous pressure and coercion not to be mothers — popularly known as “maternal mobbing”, a concept that is not officially recognized in criminal law. This new juridical concept has yet to be internalized by governments, but it poses a clear challenge for the empowerment of working mothers.

It is therefore more important than ever for the world of employment to learn to respect the gift of maternity; otherwise, it runs serious risks of becoming dehumanized. The work and culture domains need the “genius” of women to make them more welcoming, more “livable”, more “enjoyable”.

Protecting and supporting motherhood is a social duty. Society must promote maternity for the social function it fulfils — namely providing the world with new human beings who, among other things, will pay for the retirement pensions of their mothers’ employers and colleagues, and of the nurses and doctors that bring them into the world.

A species that does not reproduce itself is condemned to extinction. And although the human population is very large, there are alarming signs that it will stagnate or even shrink over the next few decades — certainly in developed countries, but also in those that are not developed but have similar social indicators.

L’Institut de politique familiale (Family Policy Institute) wants to use United Nations headquarters to launch the “Maternal perspective” or “Maternity perspective” in the world of work. Just as the family perspective needs to be applied in legislations and practices in the government domain, women and motherhood should also be placed at the forefront of labour legislation. The maternal perspective would thus become an essential quality in countries that wish to protect their women mothers and working mothers.

The maternal perspective can become a maternal quality seal that all of us would be able to promote, for the benefits we obtain by applying the perspective in our families and firms, with additional gains in terms of the altruism it elicits and develops in people, and becoming our society’s most powerful driving forces.